DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 837 IR 018 978

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TITLE	Traversing State Boundaries with Distance Education: The Tri-State Agricultural Distance Delivery Alliance.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	6p.; In: Distance Learning '98. Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning (14th, Madison, WI, August 5-7, 1998); see IR 018 976.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Agricultural Colleges; *Agricultural Education; Bachelors Degrees; Community Colleges; *Consortia; *Cooperative Programs; Curriculum Development; Delivery Systems; Differences; *Distance Education; Educational Planning; Higher Education; Institutional Characteristics; Instructional Development; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Land Grant Universities; *Program Development; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Tri State Agricultural Distance Delivery Alliance; United States (Northwest)

ABSTRACT

The Tri-State Agricultural Distance Delivery Alliance (TADDA) is a new distance education consortium. The three land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest (the University of Idaho, Oregon State University, and Washington State University) developed TADDA in cooperation with Eastern Oregon University and four of the region's community colleges (College of Southern Idaho, Blue Mountain Community College, Treasure Valley Community College, and Walla Walla Community College). TADDA was established to develop and deliver a bachelor's degree program in general agriculture to distant learners located at community colleges and other learning centers in the region. This paper describes the TADDA consortium and identifies some of the principal challenges that face the alliance. The cultural differences among the three land grant institutions, the regional university, and community colleges tend to be the greatest barrier to inter-institutional collaboration. The challenges of creating a common curriculum, and seamless course development and delivery are also discussed. (Author/DLS)

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Traversing State Boundaries With Distance Education: The Tri-State Agricultural Distance Delivery Alliance

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Abstract

The Tri-State Agricultural Distance Delivery Alliance (TADDA) is a new distance education consortium. The three land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest (the University of Idaho, Oregon State University, and Washington State University) developed TADDA in cooperation with Eastern Oregon University and three of the region's community colleges. TADDA was established to develop and deliver a bachelor's degree program in General Agriculture to distant learners located at community colleges and other learning centers in the region.

The presentation describes the TADDA consortium and identifies some of the principal challenges that face the Alliance. The cultural differences among the three land grant institutions, the regional university, and community colleges tend to be the greatest barrier to inter-institutional collaboration.

Background Information

The University of Idaho College of Agriculture established a cooperative Bachelors of Science degree program in General Agriculture with the College of Southern Idaho (CSI) in 1994. CSI is a community college located at Twin Falls and is situated in a major agricultural region in Idaho that is located 430 miles from the University of Idaho's Moscow campus. In this cooperative "2+2: university plus community college" (Witherspoon, 1996, p. 113) program, CSI provides the lower division classes for the bachelor's degree while the University of Idaho provides the upper division courses via distance education.

Other community colleges in the Pacific Northwest region expressed interest in similar cooperative distance degree programs in agriculture. In 1996, leaders from Colleges of Agriculture at the University of Idaho, Oregon State University, and Washington State University met to discuss the potential for the development of a tri-state agricultural degree consortium.

In 1997, the three Colleges of Agriculture and several community colleges in the region formed TADDA. The focus of the Alliance is the development of a multi-state, collaborative, bachelor's degree program in General Agriculture that can be delivered to place-bound learners in the Northwest. To create the bachelor's degree, the community colleges provide the lower division courses while the three land grant institutions develop the upper division courses for delivery to the community college campuses.

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Although the courses are developed separately, they are mutually accepted by all three degree-granting institutions. Responsibility for providing the necessary student, faculty, and administrative support is coordinated by the Alliance and shared among the participating institutions. However, actual delivery of the upper division coursework is managed by the originating institutions.

The ultimate goal is to create a seamless Bachelor's of Science degree program that is available to distant learners at various sites in the three-state region. In addition to community college sites, coursework could be delivered at a variety of other community learning centers, including extension offices.

Three grants totaling $730,000 have been awarded to the Alliance to support coursework development and delivery, faculty development, and planning activities. Initial distance education courses were delivered by the Alliance during the fall of 1997. Plans are underway to develop more than 30 new courses for distance delivery during the next two years.

Current Members of the Alliance

Membership in the TADDA consortium consists of the three degree-granting institutions (referred to as the "home" institutions by the Alliance) and the participating community colleges (called the "host" institutions). Members of the Alliance are:

Degree-granting or "home" institutions

- University of Idaho
- Oregon State University (in association with Eastern Oregon University)
- Washington State University

Community college or "host" institutions

- College of Southern Idaho (Idaho)
- Blue Mountain Community College (Oregon)
- Treasure Valley Community College (Oregon)
- Walla Walla Community College (Washington)

Potential additional members include all other community colleges in the tri-state region. The Northwest Tribal College, which has a degree in natural resources, has expressed an interest in participating in the Alliance.

Challenges of Inter-Institutional Collaboration

Numerous issues must be resolved to deliver a cooperative distance education degree program. Among the challenges are: selecting appropriate technical delivery systems; developing coherent institutional policies and administrative procedures; and establishing consensus with regard to the content of courses and the degree curriculum. Additional challenges include engaging departments and individual faculty members to participate in the process, and providing comprehensive student support services at the participating institutions.

While many cooperative distance degree programs have one lead institution, TADDA represents an inter-institutional program with three lead institutions. Achieving consensus among the three land grant universities presents special challenges for the Alliance.

Although technological and pedagogical issues are basic to successful distance education programs, the greatest barriers to inter-institutional collaboration tend to be structural and reflect differing institutional cultures (Driessner, 1998). The diverse cultures of the three land grant universities have affected the Alliance's ability to achieve important consortium goals.

Common Curriculum

One goal of the Alliance is to develop a common general agriculture curriculum among the three degree-granting institutions. Although each institution offers a degree in General Agriculture, the requirements for each degree program vary. The three Colleges of Agriculture are structured differently with regard to the content areas of family and consumer sciences and natural resources. For example, programs in family and consumer sciences are part of the Colleges of Agriculture at the University of Idaho and at Washington State University. At Oregon State University, this program area is housed in a different college. The natural resources disciplines present a similar situation. Oregon State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Washington State's College of Agriculture and Home Economics include programs in the natural resources such as wildlife, fisheries, and range management. At the University of Idaho, these natural resource programs fall under the College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Range Sciences.

Another goal of the consortium is to provide mutual acceptance of all TADDA courses by the three degree-granting institutions. The current variance in degree requirements, and diversity of programs among institutions makes the goal more difficult to achieve. The challenge remains for the Alliance to develop a common curriculum without confining or inhibiting the autonomy of the three Colleges of Agriculture. Until consensus is reached, the participating institutions have the responsibility to help students examine the options and to make compatible choices.

Seamless Course Development and Delivery

The creation of a seamless mechanism for course development and delivery is another goal of the TADDA consortium. Again, this objective is complicated by the organizational structures of the three land grant institutions. The development and delivery of the TADDA coursework is managed by the originating institutions. Each of the degree-granting institutions uses a different model for course development. For example, Washington State University uses a centralized approach. Their Extended Degree Program office provides all of the necessary support for course development and delivery.

The development and delivery of Oregon State University's coursework are coordinated with Eastern Oregon University, another Oregon institution that has a long history of delivering successful distance education programs. At the University of Idaho, distance education program development and delivery are decentralized and handled directly by the College of Agriculture.

The three models for distance education course development and delivery used by the Alliance members reflect the unique culture of each institution. Each of the approaches has advantages and disadvantages—there is no ideal organizational model. Both central and local support is critical for program success. According to Driessner (1998), the consortium's goals and objectives must be supported at all levels of the institution but must be

operationalized "at the level where decisions are being made, services provided, and resources allocated" (p. 2). The challenge of working with different delivery models is to achieve a balance whereby the necessary administrative decisions can be made at the institutional level without exerting undue influence over the mission and values of the consortium.

Conclusion

Distance education provides educational institutions with opportunities to compete or collaborate with other institutions (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). The three TADDA land grant institutions often compete for students in the Pacific Northwest region. The Alliance is an example of institutional collaboration for the purpose of sharing courses and programs as a distance education consortium. Driessner (1998) states that "inter-institutional collaboration is more likely to be successful if it is mission driven and mission consistent" (p. 2). In the TADDA program, the mission is to serve the needs of distant learners by providing a quality, collaborative bachelor's degree program in agriculture. To achieve the consortium's ultimate goals, the TADDA institutions must identify and mitigate their cultural differences.

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